122 direct road, two wagon-loads full of expedition equipment to Hsining fu which was to be my next goal. I myself took along on my circuitous bypaths the entire travel money for the coming years, which consisted of two small mule packs of silver bars. No one had been willing to give me the necessary guarantee for direct transport, and so I could not risk sending this silver along with the other equipment. I could perhaps have bought a few checks on companies in Hsining fu, but in that case I would surely have been given much "poorer" silver. It is not easy to find good, pure silver 436 in the smaller cities, especially in the western part of the kingdom. 453 Besides, one incurs the danger of being very badly cheated. Thus, I had cashed a great many of my checks in Lanchow fu. These /157/ inland checks are small Chinese documents resembling letters, without any European marks on them. They are payable to a certain weight of silver with a certain number of ounces and are made out to any name you wish. Mine were addressed to "the banking firm at the sign of the lucky shot" in Lanchow fu and made out by 453 their agents in Shanghai to a Mr. Li whom I did not know. The German director of the Hankow branch of the German-Asiatic Bank once told me that on the basis of enquiries he had made of his comprador (1) he had discovered that this firm was operating

1. Comprador is a Spanish word and belongs in the vocabulary of pidgin-English. A comprador is a trustworthy Chinese of experience who is absolutely necessary to every foreign business firm. He vouches for the solvency of the Chinese firms and controls the accuracy of the Chinese checks and currency, for there are only a few foreigners who possess the necessary knowledge for testing these. He acts as proxy for the Chinese public, in fact in many business firms he is the Chinese partner.

illegally. However, the director of an English bank in Tientsin told me, after making similar enquiries, that this was by far the largest bank in the place and one that annually handles millions. Now, I do not wish to accuse those European gentlemen who gave me such contradictory information - both pieces of information were after all based on reports of their compradors - but I simply want to show the difficulty involved in carrying on business with the interior. Even the Chinese of the coast know very little

about the interior. It is almost like another world. 453

When I entered the branch of that bank in Lanchow fu I found the business office in one of the better houses, in the second court. I was offered a seat, tea was poured out for me, and before I handed over my draft I was presented with two pears. It was a large room. Beside the entrance stood the usual clay jug over a meter tall, filled with water in case of fire, and all around the walls stood huge trunk-like wooden boxes, far more than a meter wide. On some of them lay pillows and folded bed blankets. It was easy to see that the managing clerks slept at night on their silver supply which was kept in the chests and probably amounted to several hundred thousand taels. There were also weapons hanging on the walls. Thus, these people did not altogether trust the sums of money which the business firms of Lanchow fu regularly paid out to the city's company of thieves who were organized into a sort of guild. Six employees dressed in long silk robes were standing at a large table behind the paper windows and two of them read off endless columns of figures while the others rattled their counting boards. The Chinese is even more dependent on this instrument than is the Russian. Chinese bookkeeping is awkward and not clearly arranged. For this reason alone the simplest addition is made on the counting board.

"These drafts are made out in Lanchow taels," said the banker after he had examined them.

"No, it is tsching bu ping, the scale of the cotton merchants,"(2)

2. This scale is three and one-half percent larger than that of Lanchow.

I was obliged to reply.

"But it says Lanchow taels."

"Here it says tsching by ping." Luckily, I had prepared myself well before I entered the bank. /158/

"You can read?" the banker said. "He can read!" repeated the employees, astonished.

"I shall send you the silver tomorrow, if you like, packed in chests, so that you will not have to bother about it further. You can depend on it, for we are of course the largest firm here."

"I must have the money today."

"What is your illustrious age?"

"How long have you been in our miserable Middle Kingdom?" the banker continued. There were many more words and the banker

453 was the soul of politeness, but only after I rudely asked whether his business was in such a bad way that he could not give me my money at once and weigh out for me the paltry few thousand taels, did the weighing of the silver begin. Piece by piece I tested it for its excellency, many a piece had to be refused, until it had all been weighed out before my own eyes. Then the rattle of the counting boards began again. The long column of figures was added up four times in succession. In the end the silver was put in my bags and after three hours of work it was on my carriage. I sat down on top of it and drove home. Later when I used the money, only two pieces were given back to me because they contained lead. To this day I am proud of this result. It was a loss of only about 40 marks.

527 I left Lanchow fu on December 7, after having witnessed two more large festivals. One of them was the Mohammedan New Year, which is an important event in a province like Kansu where there are so many confessors of the Islam faith; the other was the birthday of the then Empress Dowager. On the latter day all the larger streets of the city were covered with thousands of large square paper lanterns all of the same shape, which were hung in several rows over the street so that one could just barely ride under them on the 531 small ponies which are used in this country. The Lanchow lanterns are particularly pretty. They are artistically painted and portray different scenes taken from the rich Chinese mythology and legends and popular romances. The figures show the well-known grotesque theatrical attitudes which Chinese artists love and are, of course, painted only in flat colors without any modelling. On these days you also see the better class of Chinese wandering through the streets and studying these paintings. I must refrain from going into detail about the pictures. They are a world in themselves. The treasure of Chinese romances is extremely rich and only in part easily available to us, namely insofar as it is of foreign, that is, Buddhistic origin. For the typically Chinese part the skilful pen is still lacking which might acquaint us with these confusing masses of demi-gods, of souls of the dead, like those of the ancient Greeks in a more easily comprehensible form.

529 On December 8,I reached the little town of Kin (pronounced Tschin) hsien, south of Lanchow, after I had ridden through thick dust and haze and through endless narrow passages three to four meters deep. Not far from the town, near Tschang kia (pronounced: dia) gao, at the foot of a long mountain chain coming from the Koko Nor region and running southeast, there is a favorite excursion